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The Pulpit

A Journal of Contemporary Preaching

Donald Macleod:

God's Christmas and Ours

Elmer S. Hjortland • "Where Is He?"

Ann Tremaine • Awful, Hopeful Fact of Faith

Martin E. Marty • Gift of Repentance

ALBERT L. MEIBURG
DON'T BLAME THE SEMINARIES!

HERBERT STROUP
COUNSELING COLLEGE STUDENTS
Perspective on the Present
(Third of Three Parts)

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The Pulpit

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PULPIT POST

Misleading

SIR: It is unfortunate for one so eminent as Dr. T. A. Gill to use a few Scriptures conveniently to prove his point and to neglect so many others that are to the contrary. Let me suggest that the author of "Toward an Earthy Church" (Oct. issue) read the seventeenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel. Just one or two other passages of many in the New Testament of a kind are John 15, 18, 19, John 8:23 and 1 John 4—6. The great theologian knows better. The young men may be misled by his example.

J. CALLAWAY ROBERTSON
Richmond, Va.

Correction

SIR: While agreeing in general with Dr. Vernon L. Taylor's thesis in his article ("The Classical Approach to Homiletics," September issue) and with the conclusions and implications he drew from the cited material from my doctoral study, "Analytical Survey of Speech Education in . . . Seminaries," I must correct one misquoted statement.

I did NOT "use 'speech' and 'homiletics' synonymously." On the contrary, the following explicit statements of that difference were made: "The word 'sermon' cannot be substituted for the word 'speech,' nor 'congregation' for 'audience,' nor 'public address' for preaching. Further . . . the contemporary disciplines of rhetoric and homiletics . . . are likewise not synonymous." (See page 7 in the study.)

Dr. Taylor made one charge which I wholeheartedly applaud — but which my own data did not justify stating in the study: that one reason for the tragically outmoded preaching pedagogy in our seminaries today was "that many of the homiletics courses are taught by men who have had . . . success in the pulpit." No self-respecting speech department would permit a Georgie Jessel or even a Bruce Barton to *teach* (as opposed to "guest lecturer") a course in speech. Yet my survey indicated that NO MORE THAN 39 of 160 teachers of speech and/or homiletics surveyed in 79 seminaries have had more than an undergraduate major in speech! In view of these findings, Dr. Taylor's further conclusion seems quite valid and justified: that our seminaries may be teaching little more than "a series of casual tips" on preaching, and that

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The Pulpit

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The Equipment of The Saints

DURING the Second World War Harry Emerson Fosdick delivered a sermon entitled "When Great Events Make Common Tasks Seem Trivial." The subject and the sermon fit the times. They spoke to the mood of a people so much caught up in the swirl of gigantic movements and exciting duties that they minimized and neglected routine responsibilities. Our condition, mood and need in this latter day are different. It is no longer great events which make common tasks seem trivial but dire portents which make both great events and common tasks seem futile. Standing as they do on the edge of a possible annihilation of mankind, our people are naturally tempted to ask what purpose there is in planning and working for a tomorrow which may never arrive. Why build these cities glorious if any one of them can and may be obliterated tomorrow? Why dream and scheme and sacrifice for the education of children who will never grow up to be men and women? Thus the peril which hangs over us day after day can cut the nerve of living, paralyze all hopes and plans and blight all life's colors with frosts of fear and uncertainty which come too soon.

Of course people do go on living and planning for the future. When we do not stop to think about it we take the future for granted and our planning for it is a kind of reflex action.

Nevertheless, we are preoccupied with the bomb. In recurrent yet undiminishing waves our awareness of its menace rolls over us and through us. Its mechanism ticks incessantly in our brains. And what we push out of our minds in escapist entertainment seeps into the marrow of our bones.

Such a threat can deaden joy in simple things and routine tasks. In the diurnal duties, in the soil, in the greenness of green and the blueness of blue and the freshness of air, in the neighbor, the chore, the croquet game, the hearth we lose all pleasure and see no sacrament. It therefore becomes a part of the pastoral duty for the minister to help his people celebrate life, teaching them and nurturing in them the sacramental significance of household tasks, of ordinary personal encounters, of bread-earning jobs. He must awaken in them the vision which sees that every bush is aflame and arouse or cultivate in them joy in the poetry which is concealed in the prosaic. He must urge upon them the thrill of being "faithful in a very little," which may prove to be their only warranty that they are "faithful also in much."

Let it be noted, however, that the minister will not be able to bring this off merely by exhibiting a sunny disposition. He must go back with his people to the God who made life and called it good, who lets man be beset by adversities and who ordered the earning of bread by the sweat of the brow. He must rest with his people upon the God who approved life, struggle and labor, who "set the solitary" in families and who, when he appeared on earth, came not from the sky but into a family. Seeking a ground on which he and his people can solemnize life, the pastor must sit and must set his people at the feet of those acts through which Jesus Christ vindicated the common ventures of life in the midst of world-shaking events: the marriage at Cana; the conversations with Mary and Martha; his childlike joy in flowers, leaven, seed and a cup of water; his reading of divine meaning in the simple act of a woman who cooled and soothed his feet with precious ointment; and that last act from the cross in which he prepared for the care of his widowed mother. Thus our Lord stamped the seal of God upon the wearisome routine, fitted our general experiences into the cosmic scheme and sanctified the debts which human beings owe to one another.

Martin Luther once said that though he knew that the world were coming to an end tomorrow he would still plant his apple tree today. If the world is coming to an end and the soul is ready for it, what is there for us to do better than what any day calls us to do. God has appointed us to plant, not to inquire whether planting is prudential. He has appointed his people to live in the abundance which he gives us in his Son, not to calculate whether living is practical. The world is always about to end and our role as pastors is to keep our people alive to life under the threat of death. If great events are snarled and seemingly beyond any man's unraveling, we can help our people praise God by ordering to their good and men's pleasure the little events of life. If in big

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God's Christmas and Ours

By Donald Macleod

"To all who did receive him . . . he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12.

IT WAS almost evening of the day after Christmas, and the night watchman of a large department store was setting out on his usual rounds. Floor after floor presented the same wild disorder: piles of mixed up goods; boxes and cartons of all shapes and sizes, uncovered and tipped; indeed, a miniature cyclone could not have left a worse jumble behind. But a bigger shock awaited the watchman when, under one of the counters, he found a man who, apparently, had been pushed aside and trampled upon in the mad rush of shoppers on Christmas Eve. The man was an absolute stranger, and no item of his clothing provided a single clue to his identity. But when his body was examined for markings, nail prints were found in the palms of his hands.

This incident prompts us to ask: What actually did we make of Christmas this year? Did we get closer to its real meaning and thereby receive something that brought out the best in us? Or did we exaggerate the tawdry side of it and trample its true glory under foot?

Today we stand in the afterglow of the holy festival when the more sober-minded among us are apt to reflect with mixed feelings upon what we've seen and heard. Who among us did not feel tempted to succumb to cynicism or to turn away with a heavy heart at the sight of what we have made of Christmas? Every facet of the distinctively religious message of the coming of God among men in the person of the little Child was seemingly exploited for commercial ends. Loudspeakers in shops and supermarkets blared out and crackled with sacred songs, and "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" was canonized afresh among the hallowed symbols of what was originally the mass of Christ. Whenever the organ strains of "Silent Night" did float over the commercial scramble they seemed rather out of place, and the most pertinent question we might have asked was: What do these shoppers know about it — or what do they care? Karl Barth has deplored the tendency even among Christians to celebrate Christmas as though it were just another carnival.

We said that our disdain of these actions was justifiable, but as Christian men and women we must be awake to the subtle danger that this reaction can develop all too easily into a sort of religious sophistication which can be just as harmful to Christmas as our perpetual vulgarizing of it from year to year. It is easy to acquire a smirk of self-righteousness; it is not always easy to get rid of it. Certainly it was never intended to be a Christian virtue to drive all gaiety out of Christmas and to frown upon everyone who was not ninety-nine per cent piety-processed.

These, however, are a minority and surely less of a threat to Christmas than that larger segment of our people who are strictly urbane when it comes to celebrating any Christian festival. These people put the damper upon all excitement except what they have specified as acceptable. It is quite all right to become excited over a football game and to engage in some social high jinks for, after all, they are fans; but let anyone become excited over a religious festival and immediately he is dismissed as a fanatic. It is to be expected that ordinary folk should get excited over Christmas and celebrate it in their own way, but the more privileged are determined to keep their emotions under wraps. Instead of Christmas making our culture, as it did in days gone by, an effort is being made today to permit our culture to absorb it. And therefore Christmas is associated with the well-dressed man, with the best to eat and drink, and with all that is socially acceptable in "respectable" circles. There is scarcely a slick-paper advertisement coming out from Madison Avenue these days which does not put the product first and Christmas a poor second. Frankly, I am more afraid of what these people are doing to Christmas than of all the hucksters in the shops, because these influential pressure groups can take this beautiful festival that has put its stamp upon history forever and they can drain it of

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l its sentiment so that it ceases to be a living, reative and vibrant thing and becomes, perhaps, n article for cold, objective research.

As a result of this attitude we are seeing some nfortunate things happening to Christmas. Pri-narily there is a smothering of the sense of wonder. Ve are expected to wonder at a Tiffany necklace r a piece of tailoring from Saks Fifth Avenue, but he fact of Christmas must be handled with autious, cool and blasé decorum. Yet simple hepherds on a hillside wondered at something that roke suddenly into their lives, and today, after two thousand years, what they saw still turns wretched persons into saints and sends them out on seemingly profitless errands to turn men from sin to God. Further, these pressure groups dissolve the Christmas horizon. Now a horizon is simply where the sky meets the land or the heavens touch the earth. This sense of a new horizon has always been at the heart of Christmas but it is in danger today of being swept away by a generation that concentrates upon the here and now. The Christmas horizon declares that a new spiritual order once broke into the patterns of daily life and laid a moral claim upon mankind so that any one of us who would be free and great in the truest sense must submit to Someone higher and holier than ourselves. And further, they are taking away the sense of real joy that rightly belongs to Christmas. They misconstrue as joy the feeling of well-being, of jaunty fellowship, or the glitter of office parties; but these are not experiences of real joy. Joy is a by-product of good news. And Christmas joy comes from the proclamation that God has acted in a new and different way and so our lives can never again be the same.

Now, in all this, the common error is that we are making Christmas into the image of what is first and uppermost in our own lives. It has become a Christmas of our own fashioning, not God's. This is the very opposite of what the first Christmas was and did. As that Christmas broke into the ancient world it created a new age and because of it men talked about a "before" and "after." The old Jewish Law as a means of saving men was repudiated; professional religion was exposed and rejected; the idea of a remote and vengeful God was put down; sham and false security were routed. Good news was abroad because Eternal Love was alive in a Person whom men could see and touch and in whom it would finally be vindicated as the only power by which men can truly live.

We see, moreover, how this makes nonsense of the annual campaign to "put Christ back into Christmas," of which most of us are getting rather tired of hearing. Christ is *in* Christmas already and has been from the beginning, and therefore our responsibility lies in getting him into ourselves, in recovering somehow that dynamic secret without which the first Christmas would have been the last. It is plainly a matter of permitting Christmas to do something to us rather than our covering over of what God intended for it by our carnival of jolly paganism. This is what John wishes to teach us in his Gospel when he summed up the impact of Christ's coming to the world, "To all who did receive him . . . he gave the right to become children of God."

"To all who did receive him." We see that Christmas involves, first of all, an encounter with something beyond our ordinary experience. Our usual celebration of Christmas is a matter of playing around with superficialities — decorations, presents, parties and the like — but rarely with coming face to face with the central figure in the Christmas event. Christmas tells us something about the nature of God — who he is and what he wants us to do. And if there is anything that the Christmas story makes clear to us it is that God made man for fellowship with himself. The Greeks thought that man was a plaything for the gods, but Christmas declared that man is the loved one of God. Hence Christmas is God's appeal to man, an appeal either to be hearkened to or rejected. Canon Peter Green of Manchester was addressing a group of boys and the question arose, "Why does God show himself to some and not to others?" And with more than average wisdom a thirteen-year-old said, "He shows himself to those who want to see him." Christmas proclaims a God who craves fellowship with his creatures and whose full intention for them becomes meaningful and real when you and I receive him.

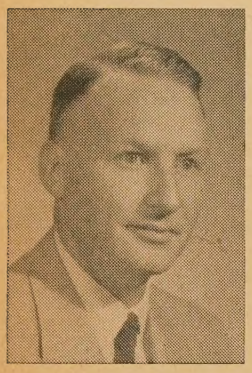
But Christmas does more. "To all who did receive him he gave the right to become. . . . " What a tremendous phrase this is — "the right to become." Indeed, until the first Christmas no one had ever dreamed of anything such as this. Pagan rites and philosophies had taught that man was involved, was caught, in a cycle of existence from which there was no escape. The symbol of this philosophy was a serpent swallowing its own tail. Man's mournful theme song became something like this: "I am nothing, and nothing matters." And what is more, no one could ever declare that he had the right to become anything within the ceaseless orbit of the circle.

But the birth of Christ put an end to all this. It did not, however, give men the possibility of becoming something under their own power, but through this new revelation of God's concern for men they had been given a new standing. Now men had new rights — the right to receive what God wants to give them. Life was symbolized no longer by a circle; it was stamped with the image of a cross. Under the circle idea no one "becomes." The symbol of Muhammad was the crescent. Hitler's swastika was a cross bent to fit into a curve. And the wheel went round and round. But the

cross breaks the circle forever, both literally and figuratively. Into every situation in which the cross is thrust, its central vertical timber planted in the earth symbolizes that God has dealings with his world: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Its horizontal beams, protruding outward, break the cyclic round of a sheer relativity and draw the line between what is God and not-God, between right and wrong, between love and hate. In other words, the cross is the symbol of conflict and struggle, and those of us who accept it are given "the right to become." It is the key to our moral and spiritual growth.

Finally, God's Christmas involves true fulfillment. "To all who did receive him . . . he gave the right to become children of God." All too glibly today we say of one man, "he's arrived" and of another, "he's got it made." And all we can mean by these remarks is that a man is trying to make himself into the image of what the public considers to be successful. But Christianity is the divine art of making men, and its end product i a child of God. Someone asks how this can be done It is never a matter of doing this or that, or o pleasing this one or that one: with Christianity i is not a matter of *doing*, but of *being*. "Becoming" and "being" are matters of what you and I are And Christmas reminds us that it is through wha God has done, not through anything we can do You and I have divine possibilities as long as we share this event. Henry Drummond said, "The end of the Christian life is not to do good, nor to get good, nor even to be good. It is just to do what God wills, whether that be winning or losing, suffering or recovering, living or dying." "To all who did receive him . . . he gave the right to become children of God." Any one of us is a child of God when we so live that we belong in Christ's company.

What we've been doing with Christmas is not of God's choosing, nor does it reflect his will. God's Christmas invites us to experience new being in the company of Christ where by his grace we belong.



Can Colleges Transcend the Particularities Of Their Cultural Situation?

Counseling College Students

Perspective on the Present

(Third of Three Parts)

By Herbert Stroup

IF IT were not for the dismal, despairing picturizations of college students provided by recent fiction and nonfiction, one might suppose that the current generation of youth would be the most happy, secure and optimistic group of youngsters since the beginning of time. They are the products of an "affluent society" which enjoys the highest standard of living in human history. More and more young people are being given the opportunity of securing higher education by which the doors to personal fulfillment and security are at least opened a chink. The presumed educational effects of a rational, scientific and technologically proficient culture upon the welfare of the masses is almost indescribably potent and unopposed. Poverty is fast being overcome, religious bigotry almost is vanquished, racial discrimination has received its death blow at the hands of the Supreme Court, public housing is everywhere evident in the large cities, the United Nations is broadly accepted by the people as "mankind's best hope of peace," psychotherapeutic knowledge and personnel have markedly increased, and the statistics on church membership are strikingly positive. These and other factors would suggest that America at this point in its history is a virtual heaven on earth for young people in college. Yet, college students are not happy, secure, reasonable, optimistic. Why?

College students are no more alike as a group than bankers, teamsters, farmers or artists. Each of these groupings in society is a sociological abstraction — the scientific term is "public." Their existence as abstractions, however, does not signify that they are less than real or lacking in influence. They corporately consist of a variety of roles and attitudes assumed by persons who seek

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live up to the general definition of the group. Thus, the banker, whether he is in Bath, Maine or on Wall Street, New York City, is guided by what he conceives to be his role as a banker in an American community. Also, those persons who stand outside the circle of a given public carry a social image of the insider: the banker is regarded differently from a journal editor, a college student, a lobster fisherman or a member of a co-operative community. So, the abstraction of a social group possesses genuinely controlling influence over those within and outside it. A college student as an individual person may fit few of the stereotypes granted to his group, yet to some extent he shares in the values and disvalues commonly associated with the group simply by reason of his membership.

Another way of saying this is that college is a way of life. It is relatively homogeneous in its attributes, although every complex way of life consists of various subdivisions which express unmistakable variety. Sociologically, every culture consists of component subcultures. College students, viewed analytically, fall into such subgroups as the married, the commuters, and the Ivy Leaguers, to indicate only a few of the possibilities.

The married student is the follower of Nissen-hut education. He lives in submarginal housing most often and spends some of his time discussing the relative merits of trailer, shack, apartment or the dormitory kind of living. He is pressured by the competing demands of providing income (or guilt in not being able to), and academic achievement (expected by his unmarried fellow students, parents and by practically everyone since the veteran influx into college). On the whole he is conservative in his social outlook, somewhat irritable over the precise demands of college, overly anxious to succeed. Clearly, he constitutes in his manifold attributes a subculture in American higher education.

The commuter also is a type or, more accurately, a subtype. Often he has been unable to marshal enough money to live away from home; he usually, then, comes from the lower and middle classes. He is likely to be driven by his class' ideals. He wants success, financial gain, and status from a college education. Sometimes he is unabashedly uninterested in co-curricular activities. He says that he can't waste his time. In some instances he can't, since he may be struggling with full-time employment on the side. But sometimes it is merely a matter of being uncomfortable in trying to adapt to what he imagines college life to be at its dreamy best. To him the freshman "beanie" or the frat paddle appears to be ludicrous and a hangover from an unfamiliar past.

The Ivy Leaguer also possesses his own subculture. He is a representative and loyal supporter of the WASP culture (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant). He derives his snobbishness from his identification with the so-called dominant culture of America. In part, of course, he is justified. Very often he is indeed the carrier of that culture. He is Ivy League because his parents have succeeded, they prefer the subculture to any other, they deem it a necessary hurdle to the continuance of their status in the community, they can afford to believe in it, or some combination of these and other factors.

These three subcultures in one form or another and to one degree or another are found on virtually every college campus in the country at one and the same time. It no longer matters what the name of the college or its particular history may be; commonly there are subgroups on every kind of campus which mirror these and other distinctions. In general, too, all are agreed that they are sharing vitally in the universal image of the college student.

Aside from being an intriguing sociological discussion, what does the foregoing intend to prove? Probably nothing other than the seeming fact that college students participate in a definable culture which can readily be subdivided into various aspects which influence and delineate their behavior and values. But to the minister who counsels college students intelligently it also may mean that he should be aware of which subgroup it is to which his particular parishioner belongs. To know the person's subculture is to know a great deal about him, both as to the kinds of problems possible to him and the sorts of aspirations he holds.

Although the college student participates in a distinctive campus culture, definable as the collegiate way of life, he also reflects the values and patterns of behavior which have been attributed to that way of life by the larger culture — the culture of American society. The culture of the campus is clearly dependent upon the nature of the dictates and expectancies of those off the campus who transmit their own version of what youthful life should be like. An illustration or two may make the point. Professor Austin Porterfield, for example, in investigating the attitudes of the police toward noncollege and college students has shown that college students generally are viewed more leniently and positively when they engage in escapades that involve the attention of the police. The community apparently wishes it to be so. This view of the police and the citizenry generally is part of what may be called the philosophy of sow-your-wild-oats-while-you-are-in-college. That is, aberrations of behavior which definitely would not be acceptable by those who are guided by Kantian moral universalism are condoned because they are expected. They are excused because they are thought to be an inherent part of the behavioral pattern of those who attend college. Even the disciplinary officers of colleges are at times

influenced in their actions by what they know the community is willing to overlook. An authentic moral ambiguity faces the churches and the colleges by reason of this pervasive double standard.

It would be instructive in this context, moreover, to apply the methods of Philip E. Jacob to the general population, in order that a comparative estimate be secured of the degree, if any, to which the values of college students differ from that of the general population. If the college student is "gloriously contented" with himself and his world, does he differ from his parents and from others beyond the college? If he is dutifully responsive to government, does he differ from any sizable group in our society? If he is uninterested in international affairs and yet believes that there well may be an international war within the next ten years, does he hold values which are uncommon in his home community?

The assumption that the college student should cherish values which are unpopular in the general culture as a result of his experience in higher education seems fatuous. Despite the glowing promises of the college bulletins and the naive confidence of the American people that education *per se* contains the necessary and effective dynamism to create personalities which are ideal, the unpleasant fact remains that society by and large gets the kind of product from its colleges which it itself is. In other words, higher education is largely education in adjustment — adjustment to the familial, economic, religious, military and political structures which dominate.

It would appear, then, that the colleges, like the churches, are not the prime and potent molders of youth's values which they may openly assume they are. There is reason to believe that even these would-be agencies of value impartation are themselves shaped by more basic and binding values which form the ethos of the American society.

Theoretically the churches may be distinguished from the organizations of the so-called lower religions in that the churches are responsive to the claims of an ethic which is not the mere sum of desirable cultural traits. The Christian faith is not bound by any restrictions of the natural groups of family, class, nation. In fact, it to some extent sits in judgment upon these loyalties of men even though it must relate its judgment through the forms peculiar to the particular groups. This is the meaning of Peter's assertion that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Although Jesus was born into a particular family and absorbed the culture of a particular people, he combined and expressed in his humanity a universality which transcended all his limited loyalties. Because of this, Christianity claims to be more than a culture-religion. Yet, Christianity both historically and currently has always undergone the temptation of settling for less than its full intention. At many times and places it has yielded its divine status to become the supporter of some partial value offered by the particular culture in which it happened to be expressed. There is serious evidence that such compromises characterize the churches of our time.

The colleges, too, and especially the allegedly Christian colleges, have asserted their intention to transcend the particularities of their cultural situation at least in some aspects. Not always have the colleges based their transcendent aspirations upon the Christian faith. More often they have claimed that the requirements of truth itself compromise the underlying motif for the transcultural mission of higher education. Such a view obviously need have no special relationship to the Christian faith in any of its historic manifestations. Traditionally the assertion has been supported as a wobbling absolute without a clearly defined ontological base.

Yet, it has become apparent that the ability of the colleges to achieve their supreme objective is also severely limited. The history of higher education is tragically replete with vivid examples of their inability to resist the dictates of the culture that surrounds them. The witness of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union curdle the blood on this count. Where higher education fails to assert a principle of cultural criticism it largely becomes vocational training and the sheer transmission of the agreed-upon values of the culture.

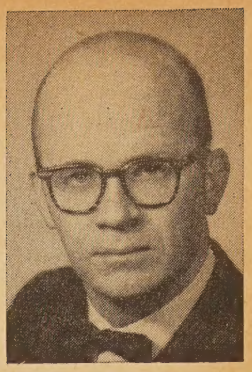
Both the churches and the colleges have not succeeded in their functions. What successes they affirm appear to reside in the realm of culture-bound achievement. Their immanentism has become both their pride and their failure.

The situation of the college student must be understood in terms of the problems with which the churches and the colleges are grappling. Students are what they are because of their involvement in the culture which forms and sustains them. The minister who counsels them cannot assume otherwise. He will perceive their problems in terms of the cultural situation as it reaches into the colleges and provides the students with the valuative basis on which they act.

Equipment of the Saints

(Continued from page 3)

things God is defied, we common people, snared by happenings we cannot control, can offer little things in which he is praised. If the will to live and the joy of living goes out of our people — their escape into noise, novelty and abandon is a suicidal impulse — then our duty as pastors is to cultivate and nurture in them that abundant life for which their Lord died. — Kyle Haselden



The Gift of Repentance*

By Martin E. Marty

Matthew 3:1-10.

JOHN THE BAPTIST could never have gained membership in any of the clubs to which we belong nor have attended any of our parties. He was a tonsorial and sartorial disgrace, bearded as he was and clothed in leather. Few gourmets would share his diet of locust and wild honey. No Dale Carnegie or Amy Vanderbilt devotee was he, for his etiquette lacked that certain something. He would not easily have gained access to modern clergy status for he could hardly have conceived of taking a Gallup poll to assess what message would "go"; how much law he could preach or how much gospel would be understood.

Yet, almost as if with humor, our Gospel tells us "Jerusalem and *all* Judea and *all* the region about the Jordan" emptied out to go down to hear the latter-day prophet and newer-day preacher. Were these the merely curious, the masochists, the eccentrics who created an S.R.O. situation on the drear and desert banks of the Jordan? Hardly. They came gladly and then heard a man pull at the roots of their being and offer them something they did not have. That something was no sugar pill, no aspirin, no cure-all. John had a different secret.

Would we have gone? Would we go today? Do we go? Does any one today come to any sermon with real expectation? When last did a publisher have to shout "stop the press" because a sermon was making news? In that slip of the tongue we find the clue to what was new in the Baptizer's message: newness itself. This deserves exploration.

John was the good kind of preacher who knew how to simplify and render concrete the complexity of life. He could funnel and filter all experience through one experience: repentance. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' " (Matt. 3:12). And we still remember it. Has this ever occurred to you: neither John nor the one he foreran, Jesus, spent much time explaining what it means to repent? This must mean that they could have assumed in their audiences an understanding of the term and the experience. And if the audience already understood it, how could this be new and attractive? Again, this deserves exploration.

My answer would be that John and Jesus took an understandable and almost homely idea and jostled it into newness by the context. Repent! Repent for . . . ! And then, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Jesus is here!

You see, John had the same problems the modern preacher does. Before he could get an idea across he had to tear it away from the cozy and comfortable context in which current culture and religion had housed it. Look at the way things were then: when the religious people, the Pharisees and Sadduccees came, their ears were stopped to the message and he had to shock them. He had to annihilate their religious conceptions, by which I mean their pattern of laying a claim or a hold on God. They did this through selfish fascination and preoccupation with their Old Covenant. John shattered this: "do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt. 3:9). He doesn't need you or your claims.

The matter stands precisely the same today. It is our current culture and religion that stop our ears to God's message; our pictures have to be shattered. How do we do it?

Well, think of what "repentance" means to us. We all have a pretty good picture. It is a certain formula, a profound religious routine. Perhaps on bended knee we tell God we are sorry and then he dispenses forgiveness and then we can do as we

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* From *Preaching the Nativity,* edited by Alton M. Motter. © 1961, Muhlenberg Press.

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please again. But, aha! at last we have established a claim on him. See, *we* did it; *we* repented. *We* knelt, *we* examined, *we* said we were sorry. God needs *our* religion as the basis for his grace.

This is the kind of thought that enters our mind if we stand in the culture of today with its religious memory. But this religion is the death of biblical faith. It routinizes the joy and the agony and again the joy of Christian new birth. In even its own terms, did any of us repent today while we were repenting; did any of us really believe in God and take him seriously in his claim on our lives?

None can answer for another personally. But collectively we can answer for our culture. It often "repents" the way David Head says we do in his parody of the natural man's "General Confession":

> Benevolent and easygoing Father: we have occasionally been guilty of errors of judgment. We have lived under the deprivations of heredity and the disadvantages of environment. We have sometimes failed to act in accordance with common sense. We have done the best we could in the circumstances; and have been careful not to ignore the common standards of decency; and we are glad to think that we are fairly normal. Do thou, O Lord, deal lightly with our infrequent lapses. Be thine own sweet self with those who admit they are not perfect; according to the unlimited tolerance which we have a right to expect from thee. And grant, as an indulgent parent, that we may hereafter continue to live a harmless and happy life and keep our self-respect.[1]

If this is our repentance, John the Baptist or Jesus Christ or the Word of God cannot get through to us with their radical newness. Forget you ever heard the Word or participated in the act, then, and listen again to the voice of one crying in the wilderness, the voice from long ago that would this Advent prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight for his new coming in Christmas and his second coming in the new age. See repentance, then, as a gift that involves a break with the past, God's turning of ourselves to himself, and the new life in Christ.

I

The break with the past. When John preached repentance it is curious that the religious did not understand it. Only the publicans, the soldiers, the harlots caught the idea — and they were outcasts in the eyes of the others. Must repentance still imply a specifically "religious" act; that is, must it be associated with a time of day and a posture and a mood and even a certain kind of personality? Too bad for repentance that it ever became associated with such a context.

I like the way one modern Christian puts it: repentance means being ranged with God in his suffering; watching with Jesus in Gethsemane; not in the first place bothering about your own needs, problems, sins and fears, but allowing yourself to be caught up in the way of Christ and into the event associated with him. That is repentance. Did you on your knees this morning let yourself be caught up in his way? If so, all is newness to you; you did repent. This was your gift.

Here our good friends the evangelists and revivalists, for all they have done to keep the modern world alert to conversion as a break with the past, have not been able to free us from certain wrong associations with repentance. From them we have often caught the idea that repentance has to do with a certain controllable technique of autobiography. No, repentance occurs in a context: "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" This is the break with the past that is housed in faith in the promise of the future.

How often do not the real people who capture the idea of biblical faith find themselves turning away for the wrong reasons. Not long ago a man asked me with surprise whether it was really true that he could be a Christian and a member of our congregation if he sometimes doubted. I told him he could not be unless he sometimes did. That is, his faith-doubt struggle must be sufficiently alive to him to matter if God is to have an opportunity. Thus Augustine: "the night of doubt becomes the light of peace." This is the break with the past.

II

The gift of repentance is also God's turning of ourselves to himself. We need but a word at this point. Repentance in its biblical picture did not involve just a change of mood or atmosphere but a real about-face, a 180-degree turn. This is the idea that unites Old and New Testaments around John the Baptist's call. This turning does not make us some sort of robots, some automated less-than-men or less-than-women. As a matter of fact, whether we like it or not, it does not even mean that we have in repentance ended Volume One of life and entered Volume Two. Someone has better described our life as one volume, the life of grace, counterpointed with footnotes that daily document the needs of the heart, the sin crying for repentance and forgiveness. But God who has judged us now heals and woos and calls; he sees us standing at the turning point, the axis. When our culture and our religion, our whole attempt to establish a claim upon him finally are worn away, he sees us turn.

III

The gift of repentance brings the new life in Christ. We pay homage to the voice in the wilderness, but we are not disciples of John but of Jesus, not of the forerunner but of the one who brings in the kingdom and its new age. Probably in February of A.D. 28 Jesus of Nazareth came to the Jordan to be wrapped up in the desert activities and to be baptized, not in repentance but "to fulfill all righteousness" as he put it in one of these

[1] David Head, *He Sent Leanness* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), p. 19. Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

ntences that still keeps us gasping and asking. rom then on, John put it best; John decreased as hrist increased. This baptism unto righteousness' lfillment led to the baptism of Christ's death and he new life in his resurrection. And in it the epented are given newness, new life. There ought o be S.R.O. for this; stop the presses once again!

What does it look like?

Of course, repentance belongs still to our worship life as much as to our other six days. We see it most in connection with baptism where it is the implied prerequisite and the manner of renewal. Connecting it with baptism, Martin Luther even liked to call this "the third sacrament," for in it he saw one "earnestly attacking the old Adam in us and beginning a new life" which is what baptism is; "repentance is nothing but a return and re-entry into baptism."

Popular piety connects it more, however, with the Lord's Supper. Most of us would feel uneasy if we were to commune without some formal act of repentance; in it we see a break with the past, a turning by God to God, a new life beginning. The New Testament gives us good reason for this connection, but it does not let the idea of repentance exhaust the Lord's Supper reality. It is interesting to me, for instance, that many Protestants who observe the twentieth century's rebirth of evangelical worship, and who like to say that many aspects of it are "Roman Catholic" in their mood and color, are usually the people whose dominant idea of the Lord's Supper is connected with the least creative idea of the Roman Catholic view of it, as seen in penance.

I am speaking of the people who want the Lord's Supper to be not only solemn — which is proper — but also sad. It is to be part of a self-preoccupation of repentance and contrition and penance instead of the fuller act of being caught up in the way of Christ, participating with him in his watch in the garden and then sharing the joy of Eucharist, of thanksgiving for his real presence.

If repentance is a turning to new life, the Lord's Supper should show it. Let the choir sing during it; let us be conscious of the fact that it is a meal. I wish that we did not routinize the Lord's Supper into little chips of bread and little tastes of wine. I wish we could tear tasty chunks off great loaves; and did it ever occur to us at this meal to taste the wine of Christ's coming? This too, is *metanoia,* repentance, turning, newness.

But let us not be content to see repentance only in our religious connections; let's look at the other six days. Does its newness touch all of life? We must recall that repentance in the New Testament is not a sour, dour, mournful act — Jesus scolded those who made a show of their humility and long faces. It is in its own way a joyful sundering with the past and its tug and pull; it is extrication. It is new wineskins and new garments and the joy that sons of the bridegroom know who do not have to fast — even as John's disciples did — because the bridegroom was here.

This too gets spelled out in the New Testament. Here there is something startling to notice. When the new life began in repentance men asked John the Baptist what to do. Now the flaming radical sounds most conservative indeed. He didn't say: adopt my clothes and haircut and diet and habitat. He plunged them right back into daily life, into the life of God in the middle of the world. They would eat the bread and drink the wine of the kingdom not in the wilderness but back at work: as publicans (what God-pleasing opportunities were in that cheating vocation?); as soldiers (and you know what the military is like!); as just plain people who knew and shared the wretchedness of human need and responded in charity.

These were, then, repentant people and real people; I think we would have liked John's products. They would be a lot like G. K. Chesterton described himself when he wrote how he took "a fierce pleasure in things being themselves . . . the inkiness of ink, the startling wetness of water excites and intoxicates me; the fieriness of fire, the steeliness of steel, the unutterable muddiness of mud. It is just the same with people." Let us have more like this. Let us see repentant people go back in newness, looking and acting and sounding as if the new life in Christ has begun.

Let us see this in a thousand ways: in the ways we prepare for Christmas and practice its charities and taste its delights. In the way we handle our child on our knee and regard the child in the manger. In our attitudes toward race relations and to those who have no rooms in inns; in our foreign policies and our fiscal policies and the reckless ways we stuff a church offering envelope in faith; in our regard for the glass of water and the outstretched hand; in our intercession for the troubled.

Do you see . . . these are arts, these are gifts?

You cannot command the second birth any more than you can the first; you cannot command the birth to baptized, communing, repentant new life any more than you can command natural birth. But you can share God's task of enlarging its scope whenever you regard again the self-emptying activity of God in Jesus Christ; when you see him edged out of the world on the cross and in the way he enters the center of the world in the perpetual Easter of his resurrection and our resurrections. This is the turning for us, the repentance, the newness.

It all depends, does it not, on the character of God. Can we wonder as did Micah (7:18), "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity. . . . He does not retain his anger for ever because he delights in steadfast love." When we see repentance as a gift, we see God delighting in love and we, in newness.

"Where Is He?"

By Elmer S. Hjortland

Matthew 2:2.

LONG AGO, wise men came from the East to the court of Herod with the question, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" The learned men of the king's court pointed toward the little town of Bethlehem, a short distance from the Holy City, and there the wise men found the promised Messiah.

Before and since that day, men have asked the same question, "Where is he?" For us, today, there is no King Herod to approach, no Bethlehem town to which we can travel, no stable door to push open and no cradled Babe before whom we can kneel and bring gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh and a humble heart. However, the question remains: "Where is he? Where is he *today*?"

Just as the ancient wise men turned to the biblical record for light as to the birthplace of the Savior, so must we turn to the Bible for our answer. There we find a simple statement given by our Lord himself: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Is not this a clear, understandable definition of the Christian church? The number may vary from two to two thousand to ten thousand, the setting may be a simple prairie home where family worship takes place or a stately edifice housing a large congregation using a formal liturgical service, but if the people are gathered together in his name, he is present, he is in the midst of them. This is the church!

I

Today when we think of a group gathered in his name we think of our own local church, the one to which we belong. It would seem then that we should begin our search for Christ in our own church. Are we gathered together in his name?

Recall that dramatic scene, early in Holy Week, when Jesus drove the money-changers out of the temple. "It is written," said Jesus, " 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers." Note this phrase, "you have made it." The people of that day, the religious leaders included, had turned the temple of worship into a place of intrigue and unholy arrangements with ruthless money men. Eventually this same scheming clique — who tolerated the money-changers, shared in the profits, and turned the church into a gathering place of evil — would also plan the crucifixion of Jesus. "You have made it a den of robbers."

The same responsibility rests on us: whatever church we belong to, we make it what it is today. The church we count as ours — the one we attend on Sunday mornings, the one to which we give our contribution envelopes, the one in whose program we share (or don't share) — that church can become something other than a house of prayer. And we shall be responsible, for we are the church.

It can become a social center, an agreeable, friendly place where the sociability of the members is its chief characteristic. The church — your church — can be run by small cliques satisfying their egos by using the power in their hands for personal purposes. They can use their position of power to promote a peculiar emphasis to the Christian faith and thus give an unbalanced presentation of the gospel. The church can become a lecture hall where the pastor with great learning and much brilliance discusses the current economic and social problems. If he is a man who possesses a wide range of knowledge and a clever mind he can fascinate his audience by his discussion of the philosophies of the world, ancient and modern, and tell of the strange ways of men down through history without once convicting his listeners of sin or arousing the question, "Where is He?"

The church can become a theological slumber party where the pastor and the members "garnish the tombs of the saints" and praise the heroes of yesterday but avoid the prophetic responsibility of today. The church can become an extension of

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a man's ego. We can glory in our particular denomination. Or the church can become a symbol of pride, a flag that attracts attention to our importance but does not heighten our enthusiasm for the gospel of Christ.

Thus we see that it is possible for us too, as well as the people of Jesus' day, to turn our church into a "den of robbers." It should therefore be the earnest desire of all of us to make the church of which we are members a house of prayer. To accomplish this we wisely construct our churches in a manner conducive to worship. An orderly, dignified service assists the mind in thinking on spiritual things. The music, the hymns and the message all point toward God.

II

Making a church a house of prayer is a co-operative enterprise. In recent years we have placed a disproportionate amount of responsibility on the minister and the musicians. Too often the man in the pew has been content to make his regular Sunday morning contribution and dismiss any personal responsibility for the creation of a spirit of reverence. As a co-operative enterprise our service includes the ushers who with dignity and friendliness welcome and seat the worshipers; it includes the choir members who are rested and alert and whose minds and hearts are in tune with the day's purpose; it includes the listeners in the pews who give reverent and alert attention to the Word. Every minister's mind is quickened, his points made clearer, the intensity with which he presents his message heightened, when he feels a unity of spirit in the morning service.

And yet impressive buildings with solemn and dignified liturgies or, as the case may be, a plain meetinghouse where cozy informality prevails, may give us only a pleasant emotional experience — the same emotional reaction that comes over us when we attend a clever play or a touching movie. God is not present in such a surface experience. When Elijah was on the mountainside there was an earthquake and wind and storm, but God was not in the wind, storm, or earthquake — he was in the still, small voice.

If he is present in our service there are several measurable effects. True worship, first of all, has a purifying influence on the worshipers. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." When his Word unfolds before us our motives are made clear to us. Our evil plans stand before us so clearly that we cry out, "God, be merciful unto me, a sinner."

We discover the difference between desiring an object and choosing an object. Just as we may desire a suit of clothes in the store window but choose to keep our money, so many of us desire a noble Christian life but do not choose such a life. We labor under the illusion that having noble desires is the same as fulfilling them. When we discern the difference between our desires and what we choose and then choose the way of him who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," it is then we have been in his presence. When Peter looked into the eyes of Jesus he became conscious of the wrongs which he had committed. But he also learned "the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world."

In true worship we discover the difference between conviction and stubbornness, humility and cowardliness, generosity and vain display, thrift and miserliness, caution and fear, adventure and lack of discipline, animal passion and self-effacing love. This discernment into the roots of personality comes to us when we dwell in the secret place of the Most High.

In worship a vision will come to us — a vision of the person we were meant to be. How often do we hear people say they are confused and uncertain about the future. How often do we hear it said that our nation has no real purpose. Confusion and lack of purpose are the results of an impure heart on both the individual and national level. We are reminded that "a man's steps are ordered by the Lord" and "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

When we are gathered together in his name there is a sharing of insights. God did not make us all alike: therefore the truth that each man receives as he comes into the presence of the Lord may be quite different from that of his neighbor. Putting all these segments of truth together gives us the whole truth. For example, we are very much indebted to the people who have written the hymns of the church, hymns like "Now thank we all our God," "What a Friend we have in Jesus" and "A mighty Fortress is our God." These hymns came out of the deep spiritual experiences of men who walked with God. As we sing them we share the composer's experience, thereby adding to our own spiritual insights. On a less spectacular scale, but equally genuine, are those spiritual truths which come to us from our parents, Sunday school teachers, pastors and good friends. The timely counsel, the handclasp of a friend, the words of praise from fellow Christians bring to mind Paul's words describing Onesiphorus, "He often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains." When Christians come together in his name there is an exchange of spiritual insight and power.

If we have spent an hour in true worship, the world will see the difference. The powerful impact that the first Christians made on the world was due to the fact that they reacted to life's experiences in a different manner from their fellow men. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he know them,

because they are spiritually discerned." Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage from 248-58 A.D., wrote:

> This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shade of these vines. But, if I climb some great mountain and look out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see — brigands on the road, pirates on the high seas, in the amphitheatres men murdering each other to please applauding crowds, under all roads misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus — an incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it, I found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. These people, Donatus, are the Christians, and I am one of them.

We will discover God not only within the walls of the church but in the factory, market place, home and on the playground as well. But we will not recognize him outside the church until we have first discovered him within the walls of the church. The answer, then, to the quest of every soul for Christ is found first in our own home church. He will be found there if our church is a house of prayer, a place where God's Word purifies the hearts of the worshipers and inspires them with visions, a house where the members exchange their moral and spiritual thoughts and testify to their faith in their daily living.

III

Where, outside the church, shall we find him? If we use the New Testament as our compass and guide we shall discover that Jesus is to be found whenever and wherever men are facing moral and spiritual decisions. The rich young ruler met Jesus when he was disturbed by his lack of high purpose and the great void in his life. Zaccheus met Jesus at the point where his contempt for himself and his loneliness made him receptive to Jesus. Nicodemus found that his cold, theological approach to life, no matter how well phrased, failed to warm his heart and give light to his path. They all met Jesus at the point of decision.

Sickness made people receptive to him. Those with broken bodies, who found life severely limited by their physical and mental ailments, came close to him, touched the hem of his garment and were healed. We find in the New Testament that Jesus identified himself with people of material need. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." He met people when they were in bondage, in poverty and in want. He met people who were shut in, cut off from the main stream of life.

Whenever a man stands at the crossroad, about to make an important decision, Jesus is there. As he is present where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is present also where people are crushed and about to be stoned by life's injustices and bitter experiences and where the future seems dark and uncertain. Listening, we hear him say, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Christ will be found in the problems that challenge Christians in every area. We are feeling the impact of new social, moral and religious ideas. No iron curtain or threat of military might will keep them from our shores. We will meet, compromise, surrender or conquer. We will decide. Do we have the disciplined, informed mind and compassionate heart of Jesus? Will we be equal to the demands of our brave decisions?

What are the moral and spiritual implications of the changes technological advances are making in our social order? The introduction of automation, resulting in greater output by fewer workers, presents us with new problems. Should we stop inventions of new machines or encourage automation? Into this difficult problem must come intelligent men of high moral stature who are equal to the intellectual and spiritual demands which these decisions require.

There are other serious problems confronting us which, if we take hold of them, will give us answers to our question, "Where is He?" Problems of health and freedom for underprivileged people: finding a place and purpose for people over sixty-five; better understanding and more intelligent solutions for the problems of the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, the mentally retarded; more humane answers for the problem of the criminal. Whenever a Christian takes hold of these problems he finds himself confronted with the mind and compassion of Jesus.

The Other Thief

Luke 23:39-43

We both was in the crowd. We seen his face.
He looks like in the pictures, but the lamps
That sputtered on the walls lit up a brace
You don't see on the screen — the thing he clamps
Before he stands or else he'd fall. I blowed
My nose and says to Joe: "My Gawd, what pluck!"
But Joe, he's Bolsheveek. He's sour and showed
His peeve. "Damn all the rich! They got the luck,"
He says. "If I'd his dough she'd be here yet."
He means his kid that broke her back last May.
The rich ain't folks to him. But still he'll set
And leave his wife lug up the coal. I'll say
Would *he* of risked *his* neck and broke *his* shin
To save us miners when the roof caved in?

GRETTA PATTERSON FULLER

THE MOURNERS BENCH

By G. Hobab Kish

IT IS the season to be merry and give gifts and, if you will allow it, old Hobab would like to distribute a few well-deserved accolades. There is neither profit nor cash connected with these presents, and those to whom they are directed will probably be too busy to notice. But it fills my heart with Christmas joy just to think of some of these saints and it may help some of you to get through the commercialization and drunkenness which has become the American way of celebrating the Savior's birth.

First, I want to give kudos to the layman who seldom agrees with the social views of his minister, but never threatens to cut off his financial support or leave the church. This fellow is not properly appreciated and he is the salt of the earth. He is that rare bird who assumes that God sends prophets not to be targets for stones, but to be squirmed under and considered. He hears his cherished ideas challenged nearly every Sunday and he never organizes a committee to oust the preacher. I'll tell you a secret. He has more grace and patience than I have and I love him like a brother. May his tribe increase!

Secondly, a resolution of appreciation to the preacher who never allows personal opposition to split the congregation. He finds himself criticized for everything from driving the wrong car to wearing the wrong necktie. He is attacked for his theology by fundamentalists whose Christianity has turned to hate and bitterness. His concern for the poor and hungry is portrayed as subversion by the Welchers and all the profit-making, professional, anti-Communists. Yet he remains calm, and loves these smug Pharisees who are not worthy to tie his shoes. He remains the pastor to all the people and moves among the psychotics like a physician in a mental sanitarium. He is a living witness to the truth that the spirit of the Bethlehem Child can possess a man.

In the third place, let me give a scroll of honor to the woman who has taught a Sunday school class for the last twenty-five years. In spite of all the changing theories of religious education and the different materials she has had to use, she has never become discouraged. Whether we were emphasizing projects or permissiveness or play or even the Bible, she has continued. And through it all, she has managed by her own Christian character and deep faith to introduce generation after generation of children to Jesus Christ. These youngsters, some of them now with families of their own, rise up to call her blessed, and so do I.

Finally, let me present a plaque to the church custodian who has served the same congregation for ten years and still believes in God. He has set up chairs for a luncheon and then rearranged them because the chairman changed her mind. He has cleaned up after thoughtless youth groups who made a shambles of the social hall on Saturday night. He has been the confidant of the minister and never betrayed him. He has kept the air fresh in the sanctuary on Sunday morning and never opened or closed a window during the prayer, the anthem or the sermon. In short, he has been a living demonstration of Christianity in action and an inspiration to the laity and the ministry.

Dear brothers and sisters, God bless you every one!

Thoughts on Preaching

✚ IN THE BEGINNING was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. — *John 1:1*

✚ WITHOUT reprieve, adjudged to death
For want of well pronouncing shibboleth.
— *Milton*

✚ I HAZARD the prophecy that that religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact. — *Whitehead*

✚ THE PALEST ink is better than the most retentive memory. — *Chinese proverb*

✚ LATIMER, Latimer, thou art going to speak before the high and mighty King Henry the Eighth, who is able, if he think fit, to take thy life away. Be careful what thou sayest. But Latimer, Latimer, remember also thou art about to speak before the King of kings and Lord of lords. Take heed that thou dost not displease him. — *Cardinal Wolsey*

✚ I HAD rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. — *Paul*

✚ PREACHING to the Church must recognize more fully the element of judgment, and preaching to the world the element of love. — *P. T. Forsyth*

✚ THE FIRST requisite of a good sermon is a clearly defined object; and this object, in the preacher's mind, should determine his choice of subject. When this simple but fundamental truth first dawned upon me I was humiliated to find how many sermons I was preaching without a well-defined object. — *Lyman Abbott*

The Awful, Hopeful Fact of Faith

By Ann Tremaine

"In hope he believed against hope. . . . fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.' . . . (And so) it will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Romans 4:18, 21-25.

FAITH is a going commodity on the American market. Recently, *This Week* magazine conducted a survey among its twelve-million readers to ascertain which sermon topics American churchgoers prefer. The second most preferred topic was: "Ways to Increase Religious Faith." Well, I am certain that the sermon will be preached. It has been, is being, preached by a myriad of American pulpiteers who continue to issue forth faith-guides: steps to a successful faith. I am equally certain, however, that Paul would not have preached that sermon. It is interesting to note that Paul nowhere deals with this problem which so plagues us. While he speaks a great deal about faith, he is not in the least concerned to tell us how to have it. And Paul's views on the subject happen to be important to us, for through his words there comes to us the true and lively Word of God — which, of course, is precisely what we believe the Bible to be.

Now our problem with faith, I think, lies in a basic misunderstanding of it. We think of faith primarily as a feeling, a kind of inner entity which is subject to our will and which we can therefore control, if we have the right psycho-spiritual techniques. But for Paul, this personal, subjective aspect of faith is an almost unavoidable response to the more important, objective, given fact of faith. His call to faith is not a call to muster up a feeling; it is a call to acknowledge a fact about the world we live in — a cosmic situation, wrought by God.

Faith is a gift — not a gift of feeling, lest we should say to ourselves on a given morning: "I don't feel very faithful today. God must have passed me by." Not a gift of feeling, but a gift of fact. And it is an awful and a hopeful fact, one which is both a crisis and a promise.

The fact is that you and I dwell on the visited planet. Some of you may remember a Christmas story by J. B. Phillips which appeared in *Presbyterian Life* a couple of years ago, entitled "The Visited Planet." With profound whimsy Phillips described how offended God's angels were that he, Almighty and Transcendent and Holy God, dwelling in light unapproachable, should stoop to visit the dark and mired realm of human existence. And why? For the salvation of those very creatures who, in primeval and persistent pride, prefer to be less-than-saved. But that's what he did, and we are confronted by the fact of it: you and I dwell on the visited planet. (Incidentally, the fact that we are not more offended by this offensive message is a pretty good indication of our share in that prideful heritage: we can't quite believe we didn't deserve the visit.)

The story of the visit is the content of faith. Paul spends most of this fourth chapter of his letter to the church at Rome talking about Abraham's faith. "Why Abraham," we may ask, "if he is concerned about Christian faith?" Now, in reading the Bible, we must not ignore the background of the writer — the situation and people to whom he was addressing his words. So we find that this return to Genesis is a kind of tool which Paul uses to argue against a particular Jewish perversion of the gospel. He is arguing against those who would have us earn our status before God by doing good works, and who use Abraham as their prime example. Paul turns the tables on his opponents, using their example to prove his point. Righteousness, he declares, is a gift from God, given to those who stand before him in faith. To clinch his argument he quotes Genesis 15:6: "Abraham believed God and it" —

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hat is, his faith — "was reckoned to him as ghteousness."

Once we understand the situation in which aul's argument was formulated, we are free to ep outside that situation and demand of the text s word for us, a word for our modern-day erversion of the gospel, which is a bit different. t makes faith itself a "good work" — a work of the will — and calls us to have faith in faith! You've heard the words: "If you just have faith, everything will turn out all right." This is idolatry, the worship of a false god, the false god of our own feelings, or what we call "peace of mind." Against his background, hear again the words of our text. Speaking of Abraham's faith, Paul says, "In hope he believed against hope . . . fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." But Paul does not leave us with Abraham; he goes on to define this conviction in Christian terms as belief "in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

Here it is, you see. The story of the visit, which constitutes the primary Christian fact, the content of Christian faith, the substance of Christian gospel. This thing has happened, whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, whether we can, on a given morning, feel it or not. And because it has happened, and only because it has happened, can we even begin this discussion of faith. For Christian faith is not faith in faith, and it does not come about in a vacuum! Christian faith is faith in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of the visit, and we are fully convinced that he is able to do what he has promised because he has already, in a once-and-for-all way, fulfilled his promise. And in that fulfilment he has wrought, once and for all, a new situation; a new relatedness between himself and his rebellious creation. In that one almost unbearable, scarcely believable moment, all the vast, dark, divine reaches become pinpointed and personal, and we look upon the face of God. Because of the visit our prayers are not addressed to abstract divinity, but begin with the audacious words which he, himself, taught us to say: "Our Father." And we know who we are, now; we are his sons and daughters. He has visited us.

This is the Christian affirmation. But the Christian does not make it lightly, for he sees the fact in its awfulness as well as in its hopefulness. He sees the crisis as well as the promise, which is to say that he sees the cross as well as the resurrection. We as Protestants like to focus our eyes upon the sign of the empty cross, the cross of our resurrected, triumphant Lord. But we would do well to contemplate, occasionally, the crucifix, the cross of our crucified and dying Lord, the cross which is to us a crisis because it judges us and demands of us.

It is significant that the Greek word *krisis,* from which our word "crisis" comes, means judgment. The crisis of the crucifix is *krisis,* judgment, because if it is true that God has visited us, it is also true that we have rejected our Visitor. The history of mankind can be told as a tale of two gardens: Eden and Gethsemane; of love twice offered and twice rejected, by Adam and Adam's sons. This is our trespass, this is our sin. We would like to regard our sin as merely sins, something manageable like drinking, smoking, telling a lie. Were sin limited to such manageable deeds, we might escape the ultimate judgment which descends with the knowledge that there is really only one sin, Adam's sin, the inescapable sin of pride. Of this sin all men, and especially those who protest their sinlessness, stand convicted. We cannot acknowledge God as God, because that would be to acknowledge man as man — God's creature — and that we are not willing to be. So we ate of the apple and we hung God on a cross. Did I say we? Am I Judas? Lord, is it I? The story of mankind is my story, as it is yours. Jesus our Lord was put to death *by* our trespass.

But Jesus our Lord was also put to death *for* our trespass. Jesus our Lord is God coming to us as we are, pouring his love into a world populated by Adams and Judases. The terrible fact of our betrayal is also the awe-inspiring fact that the depths of our degradation are not too deep for God to visit and transform in his love. The story is told of a Jew who, unlike millions of his fellows, survived the hideous torment of a Polish ghetto during World War II. He had seen the gutters running red with the blood of his family and friends. Yet he came out of these experiences a Christian because, he said, the cross is the sign of God's transforming Presence and active love at the very point in life where blood is shed.

There is much comfort here, but the assurance embodies a demand. We are not allowed to look for easy answers nor to regard our faith as an inoculation against the blood and tears which are our common lot as men. We cannot flinch in the face of either sin or tragedy because God did not flinch, and both sin and tragedy are therefore compassed about by his love. Jesus our Lord was put to death by and for our trespass, and his death demands that we face up to the facts of life and of ourselves, however unlovely those facts may be. The crucifix opens us up to the possibility of despair. At this point, the gospel becomes hard to take. Yet gospel it is — good news. It is not so much the gospel which sings, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine," as that which sings with at least as much joy, "Blessed disturbance, I am His."

It's obvious now what's the matter with the kind of faith which is a product of controlled thinking, be it positive, negative or neutral. It makes no provision for despair. It insulates itself against all disturbances, convincing men that only

peace of mind is blessed and depriving human struggle of its meaningfulness, its proper place in God's transcendent purpose. A conviction which rests on anything less than the concrete fact of God's visit is no more than a thin crust covering an abyss of meaninglessness. And when confronted with the immediate and vivid reality of pain, the crust will surely give way. For faith which has not witnessed the encounter of the celestial with the satanic; faith which is not born of the titanic struggle on that dark Palestinian hilltop and the cosmic victory wrought there; such faith is all surface and no substance. It makes no provision for despair.

But it also makes no provision for hope, real hope, the kind of hope Paul speaks of in saying, "In hope he believed against hope." Having opened itself to despair, as Jesus on the cross crying, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Christian faith moves on beyond despair, as that same Man on the cross saying finally, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." The fruit of our encounter with the crisis of faith is a new knowledge of its promise. And this movement from awe to hope may be the hardest part, really. In our present era, it's easier to recognize a crisis than to affirm a promise. We can admire the raw honesty of the beatniks, the angry young men of our generation, who pitch their tents in the valley of despair and camp there. This takes courage, but it is a premature resting place. Christian faith has yet the hill of hope to climb. And on top of the hill is the cross again, for it is, of course, goal as well as starting place and signpost along the way. It is the empty cross this time, the cross which proclaims with Paul: "Jesus our Lord . . . was raised for our justification."

Jesus our Lord was raised so that in spite of our preference for slavery we might stand before God as his sons, for this is what justification means. Sonship means relationship, relatedness, an indissoluble relatedness which is not dependent upon the personal worth of the son. This much we know from our own, poverty-stricken human relationships. How much more when God is Father, for then the relationship surrounds the whole of our lives, from crib to grave, with the framework of his sustaining, purposive love.

Americans, we are told by contemporary writers, are engaged in a frantic pursuit after status. Well, here's status for you. You want to be somebody? You can. You can be Somebody with a capital "S", the Somebody you were created to be. You have been chosen — to be a child of the living God. You are called — to an abiding relationship with him who is the Creator and Lord of this world and all things in it. Sonship — this is the promise of Christian faith. And it is a promise which goes far beyond even this present gift of status. Rooted in God's past action in Christ, it points toward that future moment when all th histories of men, individual and collective, will b fulfilled by the God of history, the God of the visit

In hope — that is, in the hopeful situation, i the faith-relationship which God has wrought an within which we stand before Him as justifie sinners, sons — in hope, we believe against an beyond hope. Against the unrealistic hopes o human society, whether they long for utopia o predict a gloomy end to human endeavors, an beyond all the ordinary human hopes which ar fleeting because they are the products of ou limited vision. The next time you are tempted t pitch your tent in the valley of despair, ask yourself: do you really think that the God who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord is going to be stumped by your problem, your sin?

We do not have to ask for steps to faith; we are given the fact of it. The fact is that you and I dwell on the visited planet.

Dr. George Buttrick has a parable for us about a little girl who had lost her way. She said to the policeman who found her: "If you'll take me to the white cross on the hill, I can find my way home from there." If the compass needle of your life finds its North Pole in the cross, you, too, will be able to find your way home.

✚ PAY sacred heed to the ministry of style. A well-ordered, well-shaped sentence, carrying a body and weight of truth, will strangely influence even the uncultured hearer. — *J. H. Jowett*

✚ VAGUE and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language, have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard or misapplied words with little or no meaning have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation, that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them, that they are but the covers of ignorance and hindrance of true knowledge. — *John Locke*

✚ HENRY DRUMMOND wrote of Marcus Dods, who ignored all the rules of good oratory, "You know at last why the man was so hidden, why he had no cunning phrases, why beautiful words do not linger in your memory, why a preacher so impersonal, and to whom you were so impersonal, a preacher so wholly uninterested in you, so innocent himself of taking you by the throat, has yet taken his subject by the throat and planted it down before your inmost being, so that you cannot get rid of it. You know that you have heard no brilliant or awakening oratory; but you feel that you have been searched and overawed, that unseen realities have looked you in the eyes and asked you questions and made you a more humble and a more obedient man."

A Prayer for Christmas

OUR heavenly Father, we praise thee that thou dost not hide thyself, but that thou didst me to us in Jesus Christ. Confidently we affirm at God is, but it is when we look to our Lord at we know what thou art like. As light dispels e darkness, so is thy coming to us.

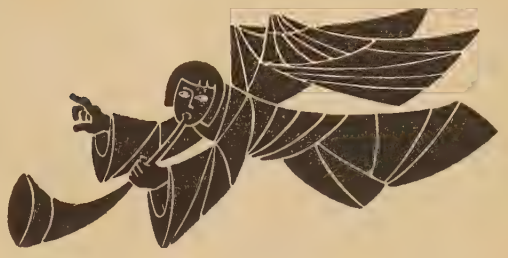
Save us from all those areas we would keep in e dark. Thou knowest our imperfections and all ur tendencies to sin. We lift up our hearts in the nowledge that with thee there is forgiveness and ope. Help us that we might see ourselves for hat we are; then, in thy grace, enable us to grow s sons of thine.

At this joyous time we lift up our concern to nee for all who are without joy, for those who are l or sorrowing, for those who are refugees or eft behind to live through the ravages of war. 'ainfully we are aware of those difficult circumtances that threaten men's souls. We do not pray or lives freed from all trouble, for we know that his is a condition of our existence. What we do rgently pray for is strength from thee adequate or all our needs.

Redeem, in thy mercy, our corporate life. We now our individual holiness is not enough for the ullest realization of thy Kingdom. We are members one of another in home, in community, in work, in nation, in the world, and we pray for thy coming in every area. To this end we dedicate ourselves anew at this holy season, that thy will and thy truth may find a clearer channel — that the kingdoms of this world might become the Kingdom of our Lord. Amen. — *Warren A. Nyberg, First Methodist Church, Red Wing, Minnesota.*

A Prayer in Advent

PREPARE our hearts, O God, for the coming of the Christ. May they rejoice in the salvation that is from thee. Prepare our minds for the coming of the Christ. Give them wisdom to interpret aright the signs of thy advent and know that a manger Child can hold the hope of the world. Prepare our bodies for the coming of the Christ. Grant them strength to follow the far star across distant desert, over high hill, and through city confusion until they enter the Bethlehem where the "house of bread," that furnishes only a stable for shelter, becomes a prophecy of the body broken. Grant us grace also to see the concern of Joseph and the hope in Mary's heart as another prophecy that this Babe is the One to bring glory to Israel and a light to lighten the Gentiles. Amen. — *Hillyer H. Straton, First Baptist Church, Malden, Massachusetts.*



A Christmas Prayer

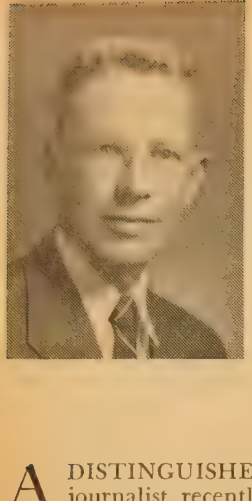
O THOU who didst hang the light of a distant star to guide the Wise Men of old to that Babe who one day was to proclaim, "I am the light of the world," give us grace to be guided today by the sun of Righteousness who has risen in our hearts.

Our gratitude is unto thee, O Lord of hosts and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every good gift is from thee: family and friends; food and shelter; life and joy; convalescence and health; the year with its seasons, summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, Advent and Christmas. May we rejoice in all of thy seasons as we praise thee for all of thy gifts.

Most of all this day we thank thee for the gift of the Christ child, for the long history of thy dealings with thy people that made his coming the fulfillment of a long desire, for the days of his flesh, for his words of life and deeds of mercy and for his willingness to be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, for us men and our salvation.

We live, O Lord, in a fearful world where no peace is; we live in a world divided into two halves, each suspicious of the other, each trying to gain advantage militarily and economically over the other. Wherever our land and the free world have been at fault forgive us, O God of peace. Teach us anew that wisdom and even right may not always be with us. Yet help us to stand firm for liberty for all of thy people in all of thy world. Hasten the day when peace shall reign over the whole earth when, as thy prophet promised, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Until such time put that peace that passeth all understanding in our hearts.

Be with the sick, comfort the bereaved, strengthen the tempted, companion the lonely, in the name of thy Son at whose birth angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Amen. — *Hillyer H. Straton.*



Don't Blame the Seminaries!

By Albert L. Meiburg

A DISTINGUISHED religious journalist recently declared that "in all of Christendom today there is no wider gap and no broader division than that which is represented by that 15-foot span between pulpit and pew — not the division between fundamentalist and modernist, not the division between denominations nor even the division between Roman Catholics and Protestants, but the division between clergy and laity, in their thinking, in their action, their views of themselves and their views of the church." As is customary today, the speaker laid a sizable portion of the blame for this cleavage at the door of the theological seminaries, which, he felt, have been remarkably successful in educating the minister right out of contact with the layman.

There may be some truth in this criticism. Some seminarians, for example, take on enough academic jargon and "faculty English" to discourage the most dedicated layman. I heard one of these brethren address a Sunday school rally on "The Implications of the Paraclete Sayings in the Fourth Gospel"! Is it fair, however, to assign all the guilt to the seminaries?

This is not to say that there is no need for critical appraisal and intelligent evaluation of seminary education. *The Survey of Theological Education in the United States and Canada,* for example, was a much needed study. It has served and will continue to serve the important purpose of evaluation and assessment. Its findings clearly indicate the need for an improved educational philosophy and methodology. In the final analysis, though, we cannot continue to make the seminaries the whipping boy for the failures of the church and the ministry at large to cope effectively with the intricate tasks of our day.

As I look back on my ministerial training, I recognize my indebtedness to my seminary. In the first place, theological education helped me to master the fundamentals of the Christian faith. It was my impression then that a strong emphasis of my particular school was its devotion to the basic documents, the scriptures, and the tools necessary to their intelligent and relevant interpretation. Secondly, the seminary opened my eyes to the multiform channels of Christian service. Not only did it show me the broad variety of vocations which are church-related ministries, but it gave me a deeper view of the significance of the parish — the basic unit of organized Christianity. In the third place, theological education instilled within me a definition of the pastoral role as the organizing concept of the Christian minister. It helped me to see that there were many new tools available with which to equip this role but that its function of shepherding and reconciling was central. Finally, I came away from the seminary with a grateful awareness of the "opportunity of leisure," whereby cometh "the wisdom of the scribe." I felt that I had been given time to know the basic literature of the pastoral ministry without losing my desire to remain a student of scripture, of theology, of people. In short, I can speak gratefully and approvingly of my seminary.

I

But an intelligent appraisal of contemporary dissatisfaction with theological education raises the question: Is there an underlying reason for the symptomatic complaints? On at least one point the clamor of the critics seems monotone: we have not yet found the optimal relationship between theological education and the church. If this diagnosis seems reasonable, our concern shifts to the question, are there any hopeful trends toward recovery?

There are two promising roads for the future of theological education. The first road of hope is the increasing emphasis on clinical teaching. By this I do not mean only that training which takes place in hospitals or other welfare institutions, although there is still much work to be done to make this opportunity available to a greater number of seminarians. What I am really referring to is the percolation of the methodology of experiential learning through large segments of the theological curriculum. Following a recent faculty fellowship meeting in which the discussion centered on a survey of current trends in pastoral care, several faculty members asked "How can we adapt clinical method to our homiletics and Christian ethics courses?" Seminaries are finding answers to this question.

There is widespread concern that we make pastoral fieldwork and internships more truly clinical. Russell Becker recently described the exciting In-Parish Pastoral Studies program of Yale which is a combination of the apprenticeship and clinical methods. Working pastors are enlisted to supervise groups of seminarians in the actual experience of ministering in a church. ("Can Seminaries Train Pastors?" *Christian Century,* April 26, 1961, pp. 513-5). This experiment will be followed with great interest.

Otis Maxfield, at the First Community Church, Columbus, Ohio, is likewise exploring the use of the church itself as the setting for the preparation of ministers. This is not an easy task. It calls for the church to see itself as "experimental as well as traditional, as fluid rather than rigid, as dynamic rather than static." ("Discussion on Pastoral Experience and Theological Training," *The Church and Clinical Pastoral Education.* Proceedings of the Sixth National Conference on Clinical Pastoral Education, pp. 38-52). The minister of a teaching church must be secure enough in his own position to give competent supervision to seminarians without forcing his own habits and attitudes on them. Lay people of the church must also grant the student the right to be a "mistake-maker," seeing the church as the ideal environment for growth.

A second promising road for a strengthened relationship of theological education to the life of the churches lies in the hope of creating programs of continuing education for the parish minister — for the man on the field. Whereas public school teachers are required to engage in regular programs of study in order to retain certification, the church generally re-

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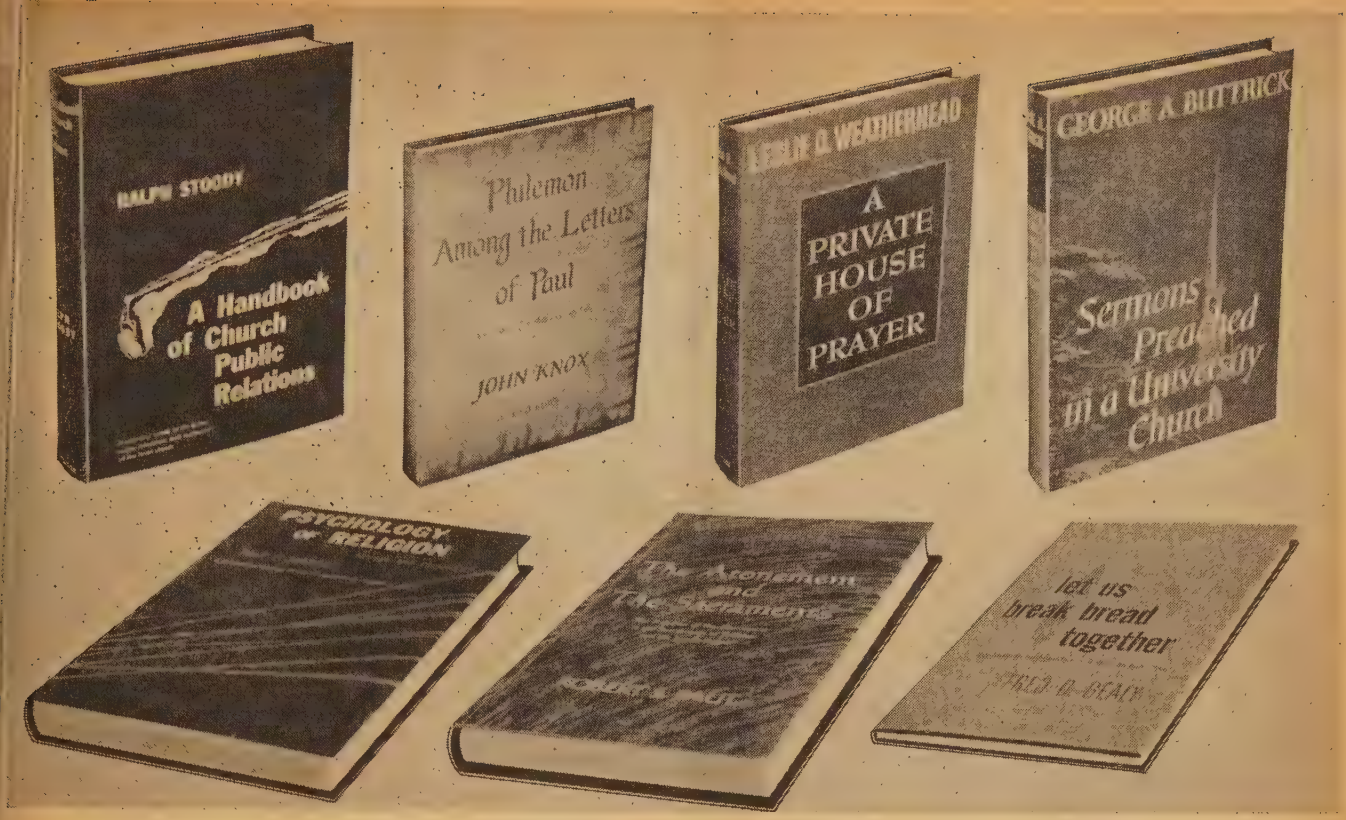
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gards any postgraduate training of the minister as a luxury or at best an option.

In his provocative study, *The Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister,* Connolly C. Gamble of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, acknowledges the many programs that for years have served this need. "Yet it seems clear," he concludes, "that these programs, while highly valuable . . . do not satisfy the educational needs. Too many programs are not correlated with the tasks of the ministry. . . . The American parish minister needs a study *program,* not merely an occasional educational contact." (Connolly C. Gamble, Jr., *The Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister,* Richmond, Virginia: Union Theological Seminary, 1960. Mimeographed report, p. 66.)

In addition to summer schools and institutes, new programs of extension work and campus residencies are being developed experimentally. Some of these promise not only to be of help to the minister but also to provide opportunities for "feedback" from the churches to the seminaries. At Union in Richmond, for example, there are six pastors in residence for twelve-day periods throughout the academic year. This group, known as "Tower Room Scholars," holds a daily scheduled conference with a faculty member to discuss recent trends in the areas of theology, but most of their day is spent on individual study projects previously approved by the faculty. During the past four years a total of 275 ministers have participated in this program.

II

It is difficult to overestimate the worth of continuing education of the right sort. However, as Dr. Gamble reports, the building of this avenue of correlation between theological education and the parish ministry awaits the development of the church's understanding of its meaning and importance.

Theological education has always been vital to the life of the churches. This is no less true in a time such as ours when the relevance of the Christian faith for modern man is being questioned and when the role of the church and its ministry seems confused. Amid the current chaos we ministers need to do more than point an accusing finger at the shortcomings of the seminaries. The task of theological education urgently demands the shared efforts of laymen and pastors, as well as seminary faculty. Only by real communication and co-operation between ministers, laymen and seminaries will the vigor of theological education be renewed and its relevance assured.

My Faith

If life were only light upon my back —
The vision always clear
Down dark and tangled ways
Where I must go!
Or, if my burden, if not light
Could be sloughed off —
And darkened paths
And tangled ways
Could somehow just be missed
And I
Not once lose face!
If all of this were true,
I'd be serene.
I'd call my fellow man my friend!
I'd have no cause
For worry or concern.
I'd know full well
That Heaven had arrived,
If all of this were true.
Well, wouldn't I?
Of course I would — I hope.
This is a strange, confusing Faith
Which talks
Of burdens bringing strength —
Of crosses taken up —
Of sharp disquiet in the breast
When others' anguish flays
And makes men quail.
What sort of universe is this!
It seems awry.
Men say God's good —
That life is sweet —
Joy unconfined.
How can such paradoxes be?
Or have I somehow missed the point?
My adolescent soul, perhaps
Cannot quite grasp
The strange and awful wisdom of the cross.
That discipline brings skill
Seems clear enough.
But let us have
That discipline be fun.
And if it's not —
I'll say I was not meant
To have that skill.
That burden bearing brings great strength
I guess is true.
But let those burdens now seem light.
Let them bring no discomfort
To my back!
Well, listen here —
Did not that vagrant carpenter
Himself say this?
So — let my yoke be easy and
My burden light.
And when I lose the zest for carrying
I'll make quite sure
That something, someone else
Is then condemned.
I'll not take blame.
I'll see to that.

And when the journey of my life
Draws near maturer ends,
And I discern
That what I tried to carry, and then failed,
Was just the beastly burden of myself —
That if the burden I had shouldered had been His —
And if the path of life had been His way —
'Twould all have brought more joy
And that, a kind of joy
That only comes
With vict'ry over my poor littleness.
Mayhap when that time comes
I'll better understand
My Lord's high wisdom.
Oh yes, I know I'll know it then.
And if it's not too late
I'll follow Him.
I'll walk His way.
I'll bear His cross.
But if because my waning powers
Put this beyond my reach,
I'll then just plead His mercy,
Beg His love, His patience
For my stubborn soul.
This is my faith.

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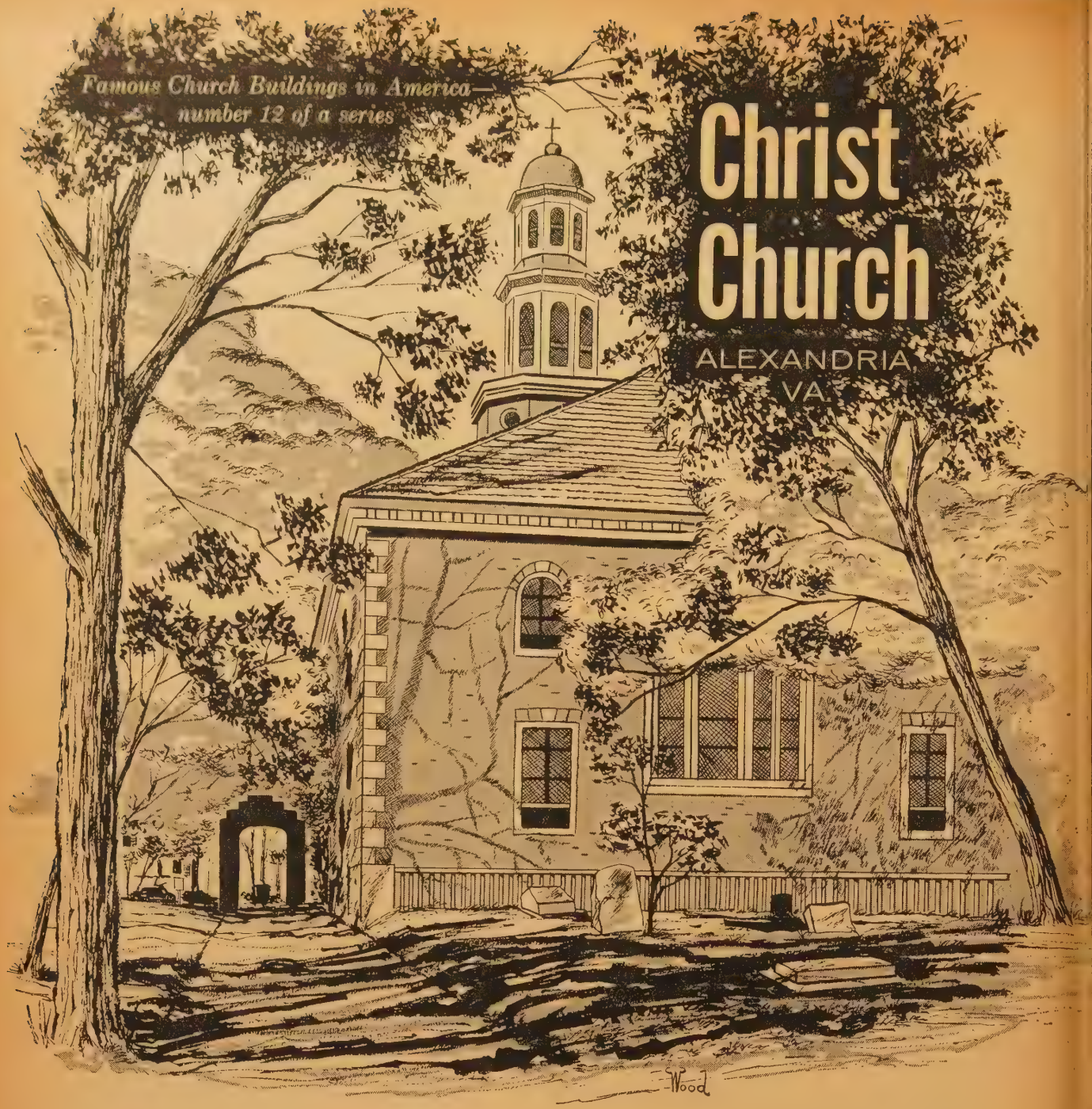

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Book Reviews

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK. *By Sherman E. Johnson. Harper. $5.00.*

THE PATH TO GLORY. *By J. R. H. Moorman. Seabury Press. $4.75.*

THE THEOLOGY OF ST. LUKE. *By Hans Conzelmann. Harper. $5.00.*

CURRENT offerings designed to aid in preparation of a pulpit ministry rich in biblical understanding include a valuable commentary, meditative reflections on the gospel, and guide to careful theological work. Sherman E. Johnson, dean of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, contributes an original study of *The Gospel According to St. Mark* to the Harper New Testament Commentary series. A worthy sequel to his *Abingdon Bible Commentary* exegesis of Matthew, this work endeavors to go back of the search for the meaning of Jesus' life and teaching to the prior question of Mark's presuppositions and his understanding of the words he used. The commentary proceeds from Dr. Johnson's own translation of the gospel in fresh, simple English based primarily on the Nestle text.

In his introduction, Dean Johnson condenses into thirty illuminating pages a compact summary of recent research concerning Mark. Behind this gospel's "combination of art and apparent artlessness, of simple verisimilitude and theological reflection" he sees a complex blending of oral tradition with several short written sources which — without undue claim to finality — he seeks to identify.

J. R. H. Moorman, bishop of Ripon, has produced a meditative narrative on the Gospel according to St. Luke, dealing in circumstantial detail with the text in the Revised Version. Strong in moral and spiritual insight drawn from Jesus' teachings, it fails to ask the important critical questions. Bishop Moorman does not search for the unique contribution and point of view of this gospel, but tends to assimilate it with the other synoptics and even with John. The emphasis rests so heavily upon the supernatural as to minimize Jesus' full humanity and the historic conditions within which his ministry was set. Despite this circumscribed view of the commentator's task, the work is done with beauty and discernment.

Geoffrey Buswell's translation makes available to English readers Hans Conzelmann's scholarly probing of *The Theology of St. Luke.* New Testament scholarship, having recognized that in order to grasp the ministry and message of Jesus it is necessary to see the gospels as reflections of what the early church believed about him, has pressed its quest further to ask concerning each of the gospels, What were the theological convictions which guided this evangelist? What were the effects of his theological position on his handling of his materials? To these questions Dr. Conzelmann, professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich, addresses himself.

Of central significance is the problem faced by the church of Luke's time in the delay of the Parousia, and the consequent necessity of re-evaluating the eschatology of the first Christian generation. Comparing Luke's text with his sources, Professor Conzelmann finds the evangelist's view of salvation history falling into three periods: the time of Israel, closing with the ministry of John the Baptist; the time of the ministry (not the life) of Jesus, during which Satan had been driven away and the disciples knew peace; and the time of the church, in which Satan had returned to subject the Lord's followers to trial until his final overthrow at the promised Parousia. The message, and the role of the messengers, are seen in the light of this understanding of God's rule in history.

This is a book for the reader prepared to follow a careful argument based on detailed analysis and on subtle studies of the nuances of phraseology in the Greek text. The insights it yields richly repay the demanding effort. — *Merrill R. Abbey, Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Ill.*

GOD'S PROMISES AND OUR PRAYERS. *By J. C. K. Preus. Augsburg. $3.00.*

MY HAND IN HIS. *By Herman W. Gockel. Concordia. $2.75.*

JESUS SAYS TO YOU. *By Daniel A. Poling. McGraw-Hill. $2.95.*

LET GOD IN. *By Lenn L. Latham. Prentice-Hall. $3.50.*

IN *God's Promises and Our Prayers,* which the jacket advertises as "a book for family worship," Dr. Preus has given us a rich treasury of original and selected prayers for daily use and for all the special occasions in normal Christian experience. The book concludes with selected prayers from the Bible and Christian worthies of the past. The use of this type of "prayer book" is to be encouraged in the establishment and maintenance of family religion, the Christian faith at the grass roots, and also as a discipline for the prayer life. It is always good for us to check up on the language we use as we worship God. The nature and aims and method of Christian prayer are beautifully exemplified in this volume.

Dr. Herman W. Gockel, author, TV director, editorial feature writer and script writer, is not too busy to give to the Christian church a collection of

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110 relevant and significant devotional messages in *My Hand in His*. Each message illuminates a well chosen text of Scripture and each message exalts the Lord. There is inspiration here for God's people in their daily life; the preachers will find here a wealth of telling illustrations.

Dan Poling has always been a blessing wherever I have met him — at home or abroad. He always has a message. In his latest book, *Jesus Says to You,* we have 40 deeply devotional, deeply personal messages on as many of the eternal absolutes of Christ. Every exposition touches some phase of daily Christian living.

Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peale have popularized in our day the "do-it-yourself" programs for personal development in social and religious relationships. This kind of labor has brought forth a lot of good. As of this year we have an excellent volume in this field from Lenn Lerner Latham called *Let God In*. Here you find what Latham and hosts of Christians in all ages have found about the secrets of joyous and effective Christian living. Mr. Latham has been a pastor for many years, and in this time has accumulated a wealth of vital experience and a plethora of anecdotes. His book would aid anyone in making progress in the Christian life. Pastors will find here a storehouse of usable material. How could there ever be a dull sermon with such helps at hand? Everyone will not go along with Brother Latham relative to life insurance and faith in God (he dropped his life insurance). Some of us believe that providing life insurance is a matter of Christian prudence. In this book you find a good balance of the practical and the ideal.

These four books are excellent devotional books — very well written, very readable, and all exceedingly helpful. I feel that they measure up to the Christian canon of criticism by Paul in Philippians 4:8 — "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." — *Theodore Pfeiffer, Chaplain, U.S. Army (ret.) Granada Hills, Calif.*

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IF A minister has not made much use of the Old Testament in his preaching, here is a book for him. If a minister desires to have his people read the Bible more, here is a book which will help him tackle the great themes of the Bible and whet the appetites of his people for a renewed study of the Book much neglected.

Professor Stevenson follows a definite pattern in each of his Old Testament book studies. The first part deals with "working your way into the book" in which he sketches an outline of the book, discusses the main themes, and then singles out the key verses. In the second part of each chapter he gives effective leads in "preparing your book sermon" in which he states the cardinal idea, gives several approaches in "shaping a preaching outline" and suggests some possible modern titles.

The book is stimulating and, at times, even exciting. Some of the chapter headings for his book studies are: "Wholeness and Holiness" (Leviticus); "This Nation Under God" (Deuteronomy); "When Trouble Comes to Good People" (Job); "Alternative to Folly" (Proverbs); "News of God from a Broken Home" (Hosea); "Man's Doubt and God's Answer" (Habakkuk).

Anyone who works through this book cannot help but find many fresh insights in the Old Testament and will discover there are a good many themes which will clamor for sermonic treatment. — *Karl H. A. Rest, Salem United Church of Christ, Tonawanda, N. Y.*

WAITING FOR CHRIST. *By Ronald Knox and Ronald Cox. Sheed and Ward. $3.50.*

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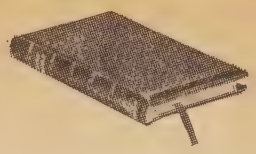

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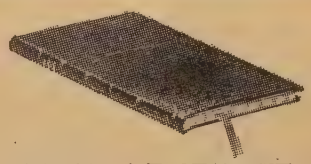

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ment by Father Knox on the left-hand pages and matching commentaries by Father Cox on the opposite pages. The author explains that not all the passages "can be established with equal certainty; where there is proof of fulfillment in the New Testament, I have indicated it in the commentary."

This is easy reading, the type that appeals to the man who doesn't want to be encumbered with many details, points of view or biblical scholarship, but who seeks a ready explanation. The author rests his case on tradition more than biblical scholarship, accepts the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and speaks of Adam and Eve as historical figures. But, he adds, "This doesn't mean that every detail is to be taken as a literal, factual description of events as they really happened; the human author of Scripture may use imagery and symbol just as any noninspired writer does; and he writes as a man of his own time, not ours, with modes of writing normal then" (page 7). Nevertheless he readily affirms that Genesis 3:15, the Protoevangelium, "fits Mary alone, who was conceived Immaculate." In several instances he refers to Paul as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, and finds little difficulty in ascribing the words of the prophets and the messianic psalms directly to Christ and the church.

Chapter 6 on the types of Christ and Chapter 7 on "Our Lady in the Old Testament" afford interesting examples of the biblical basis for Roman Catholic dogma. Mary "is the exemplar and archetype of the church; she personalizes the abstract collectivity of the church. The main proof for this is the continuous use in the liturgy of the church of passages from these writings for the various feasts of Mary" (page 275). As Christ was the second Adam, so Mary is the second Eve, and Moses' burning bush which did not burn is the symbol of the perpetual virginity of Mary. — *David B. Watermulder, First Presbyterian Church, Oak Park, Ill.*

RETARDED CHILDREN: GOD'S CHILDREN. *By Sigurd D. Petersen. Westminster. $3.00.*

THERE is probably no parish so small that it does not have at least one family struggling under the burden of a retarded child. Loving understanding furnishes the only basis for our ministry to such families. For most of us pastors, love must suffice for what we lack in understanding of the nature of this abnormality. Our ministry can be improved by such a book as Sigurd Petersen's, who is psychiatric chaplain at Parsons (Kansas) State Hospital and Training Center. He writes out of experience, combining both technical information and a pastoral viewpoint. In laymen's language, skillfully employing case histories for illustration, he helps us understand the various types of retardation, describing both the limitations and potentialities of such children. He discusses treatment, the role the parents play, and the religious needs of retarded children, always keeping in mind the pastoral concern. In addition to the help pastors will receive from this book, it will be valuable to have in the church library to lend to parents or other relatives who are struggling with this problem in their own families. — *Joseph W. Baus, First Presbyterian Church, Evansville, Indiana.*

LOVE SO AMAZING. By D. Reginald THOMAS. *Revell. $2.50.*

THE sermons in this book would have a wide appeal in many churches. They are orthodox, evangelical, and reveal an uncritical reverence for the Bible, especially the King James Version, of which the author expresses appreciation in his preface and from which he takes all the scriptural quotations one meets on almost every page. Illustrations are abundant and interestingly told, and many pungent phrases sharpen up points the author is making. At the outset we are put on notice that social reform is no answer to the world's problems. Throughout the book the emphases are on sin and temptation, for which "the tempter" (a very real Satan) is held responsible and on the grace, mercy and saving love of God in the cross of Christ. One might question some of the author's interpretations of Christian faith and life, and some of his use of Scripture is open to challenge; but the kind of preaching represented here would unquestionably satisfy many a congregation: worshipers would find it edifying — and not too disturbing.

Yet many readers, aware of the vast and rising tides of turbulence in the stream of history as it rushes us along in these 1960's, will wish for a deeper sense on the preacher's part of the stupendous issues confronting the Christian church, and indeed the whole human race, today. Although the author does remind us that through the wonders of modern news media "the tragedies of the world are dumped daily into our homes," he hurries on to show how much more wickedness than any of today's evil was involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: "This was Satan's glorious hour and, therefore, humanity's darkest hour." Yes, but we worshipers in our comfortable pews need to have that crucifixion tied in, not just with an hour in which Satan triumphed 1900 years ago, but with the world's present agonies which result from wrongs of which we are guilty and must repent, and about which, as individuals and as the Church, we must act. Saved by the cross of Jesus, we must be impelled to carry each one his own cross — not simply because of "the joy of sanctification in which, as we 'take up the cross daily' Christ conquers self and brings us under the dominion of His power," but chiefly because Christ calls us to share his compassion and to overcome evil with good at whatever cost to ourselves. The impelling power of this appeal is what many readers will miss in Mr. Thomas' interesting sermons. — *James M. Howard, Fort Pierce, Fla.*

Pulpit Calendar

Dec. 3 — 1st Sunday in Advent.
Dec. 10 — Universal Bible Sunday; 2nd Sunday in Advent.
Dec. 17 — 3rd Sunday in Advent.
Dec. 24 — 4th Sunday in Advent; Christmas Eve.
Dec. 25 — Christmas.
Dec. 31 — New Year's Eve.

Jan. 1 — New Year's Day; Festival of the Christening.
Jan. 6 — Epiphany.
Jan. 7-14 — Universal Week of Prayer.
Jan. 7 — 1st Sunday after Epiphany.
Jan. 14 — 2nd Sunday after Epiphany; Missionary Day.
Jan. 21 — 3rd Sunday after Epiphany.
Jan. 21-28 — Church and Economic Life Week.
Jan. 28 — 4th Sunday after Epiphany.
Jan. 28–Feb. 4 — Youth Week.

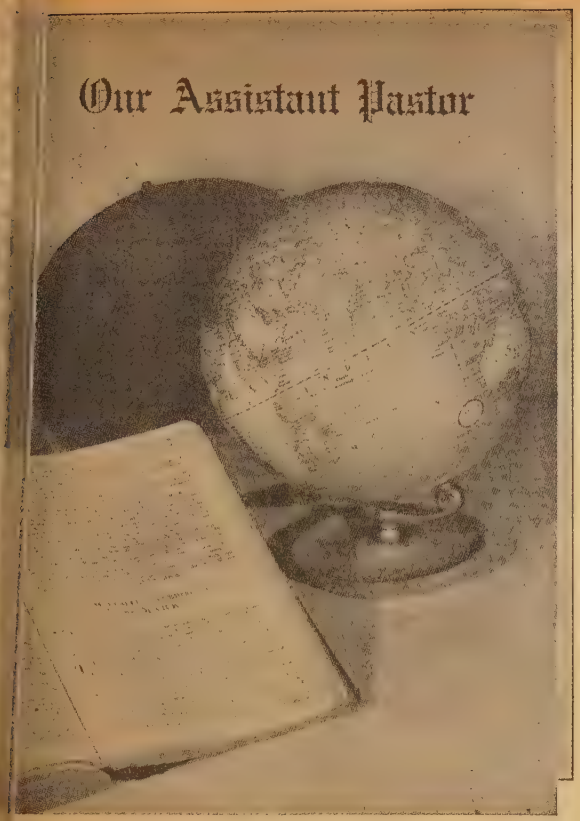
Feb. 2 — Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.
Feb. 4 — 5th Sunday after Epiphany.
Feb. 11 — Race Relations Sunday; 6th Sunday after Epiphany.
Feb. 18 — Universal Day of Prayer for Students; 7th Sunday after Epiphany.
Feb. 18-25 — Brotherhood Week.
Feb. 25 — 8th Sunday after Epiphany.

AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN: STORIES FROM THE BOOK OF EXODUS. *By Dorothy M. Slusser. Westminster. $3.00.*

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY (Abridged Edition). *By G. Ernest Wright. Westminster. $1.65.*

KING DAVID, SHEPHERD AND PSALMIST. *By Geoffrey de C. Parmiter. Nelson. $3.95.*

MANY of the guides for daily meditation begin each day's meditation with a biblical passage which is the point of departure for a homey little story with a moral or "thought for the day." Perhaps the format for the daily meditations precludes any greater depth but here is a suggestion for those who want a stronger diet.



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In her earlier book, Mrs. Slusser dealt with eleven stories from Genesis; in her more recent with stories from Exodus.

She retells a chapter or two in lucid, everyday language; illustrates its meaning more fully with passages from the Psalms, the New Testament, or elsewhere from the Bible; indicates the theological concepts; and then draws implications for personal and social living.

The author is thoroughly familiar with biblical criticism, a fact that is never labored but which keeps her from making statements which are intellectually offensive. Her emphasis is upon religious insights and these are never subordinated to technical jargon.

There is a depth in content expressed with a freshness, a vitality, a verve made rich by variety of allusion. If a clergyman is lucky enough to discover the book before his congregation finds it, he can crib a sermon or two.

Wright's *Biblical Archaeology*, abridged and brought up to date, is now available in handy form at modest price.

Using the Bible as a frame of reference, Wright shows the implications of archaeological findings for our knowledge of biblical history, geography, customs, celebrations and verbal expressions. He is never guilty of a glib equation of biblical beliefs and practices with those of neighboring cultures because of superficial similarities. With an excellent index of biblical references, names, and places, the reader can check on the flood, the exodus, the building of Solomon's temple, and other relevant data.

While Wright's book is a supplement to the Bible and presupposes a knowledge of it, Parmiter actually retells a large portion of 1 and 2 Samuel. Beginning with Palestinian geography and a survey of biblical history prior to Samuel, he has chapters on Samuel, Saul, David, Absalom, and Bethlehem. Where there are conflicting traditions, as in the selection of Saul as king, he chooses one and ignores the other. He uses the term "Semitic" to refer to a racial group rather than to a language classification. Other technical criticisms could also be made. Parmiter attempts to give almost the full story of David, full of detail, and with the addition of archeological and linguistic asides the account is tedious. He has made his own translations from the Hebrew and has added a comprehensive index. *Lee A. Belford, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, New York City.*

THE BOOK OF REVELATION. *By Charles M. Laymon. Abingdon. $3.00.*

THE Apocalypse with its beasts, horns and numerology has suffered more from interpretations, fearfully and wonderfully made, than any other books in the canon. Pre- and postmillennial special pleaders have had a field day with its symbolism and dramatic representations. All kinds of books have appeared attempting to interpret its meaning. This book is another brave engagement.

Dr. Laymon sets forth the methods of interpretation: "The futurist method," that which holds that the prophecies are yet to be fulfilled and have to do with the coming end of the world; the "preterist" approach, which interprets it in terms of the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the Roman Empire; the "continuous-historical" method, which moved beyond the downfall of Rome to the close of time; the "symbolical" approach, a sort of demythologizing process; and finally, his own thesis based on a combination of the "preterist" and "symbolical" interpretations.

"It is written for the entire body of the church and may be read with understanding by the laity." Dr. Laymon is not too sure that this is possible since he later confesses that "one cannot open it and begin to read its pages as one would with other books. Not only is new knowledge required, but also a special point of view in approaching it is necessary." Only then will we be able to interpret it. One must have "the right key." So, of course, insist all the other interpreters. The author confesses, "it is easy to lose one's way"; "it is filled with problems"; "for a puzzle it surely is."

In the main, allowing for pseudepigraphy, interpolations and the visionary, pathological tendencies of the writers of Revelation, the author of the book gives, as far as he can, a reasonable explanation.

The book is didactic and seems to be a series of class lectures the author has given. He recapitulates each lecture and stops to give the meaning to his pupils of such words as "apocalyptic," "eschatology" and "kerygma." Graphs, maps and a bibliography are included in the book. — *Orva Lee Ice, Tampa Terrace Community Church, Tampa, Fla.*

PULPIT POST

(Continued from page 2)

"the preacher in this eight-cylinder age of theological education with a Model T training in preaching will be the saddest, most neglected man in the community." This latter statement closely parallels the implication which I drew (pp. 360 ff.): that the preaching of tomorrow will suffer from the seminary teaching of today.

William K. Clark
Head, Dept. of Speech
Hiram College
Hiram, Ohio

Comment

CHRISTMAS is upon us. Already across the nation, clergymen have begun their sermons of interpretation, trying to expose from beneath the debris and overlay of time and custom, some recognizable segment of the foundations of Christmas. To their credit, most of them succeed. The "heart" is found and felt by those fortunate ones who are in their congregations.

But for many others the theme is "deplore." Popularly expressed it comes out, "Put Christ Back into Christmas."

He never left it. But he struggles mightily to be recognized in the misguided clamor and uproar soaring skyward from some of the professional interpreters of religious symbolism and from the mass of uneasy, undecided, unconvinced and uncomfortable persons who believe them enough to never completely understand or enjoy Christmas.

The emphasis is upon the wrong syllable. The Christian symbols of love, redemption, wholesome goodness and social concern as represented in the "family" story of Christmas sometimes are lost in the confusion imposed by some representatives of organized religion itself. The clergyman who scolds his "overflow" audience on Christmas or Easter morning, whether by direct reflection upon their "fifty Sunday" defection or by the "subtle" comment that "our church will be on this same location next Sunday," speaks in open contradiction of the spirit and teaching of Jesus.

What does it profit to "preach" of the "lonely crowd" and chide the "lonely man" who on one of two great religious celebrations of the year has found his way into God's symbol of family, love and redemption — the church? The marvel is that he may take his scolding at Christmas and return again at Eastertime — not presuming to find a "prodigal" welcome, but yearning to understand and be a part of God's family on earth. Only God knows how many never come back again.

If we misunderstand Christmas, let us not blame the merchant. Someone sold the Wise Men the frankincense and myrrh. Let's not blame Santa or "visions of sugar plums." These are symbols too and they are all acceptable in a concept of joyous promise that love, giving, family, new life, purity, tenderness, complete and utter forgiveness and the "oneness" of all mankind in the family of God are reflected in the Christmas story. — *Max W. Clowers, Waukesha, Wis.*

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